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The Construction of Identities in Narratives about Serious Leisure Occupations

Jackie Taylor & Stephen Kay

Engagement in occupation contributes to the shaping of identity throughout the human life. The act of telling about such engagement involves interaction based on symbolic meaning; the speaker constructing an identity by conveying how the occupation is personally meaningful. This study explored meaning in narratives told by people who engage in serious leisure occupations. A total of 78 narratives were extracted from interviews with 17 people who invest considerable time and other resources into their leisure. Analysis focused on the content, structure and performance of each narrative in order to explore meaning. The meanings were organised into a framework based around three dimensions: the located self, the active self and the changing self. Each dimension has facets that the individual might emphasise, constructing a unique identity. The framework offers a structured basis for conceptualising how occupation contributes to the shaping of the internalised self and the socially situated identity.

Keywords: Identity, Narrative, Symbolic interactionism, Occupational identity

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A human life is lived through engagement in a constellation of occupations, each being given varying degrees of time and energy. When people engage in occupations they are also engaged in the construction of their own identities. Occupations have both personal meaning and shared meaning with others. These shared meanings enable people to construct a sense of *who they are*, through *what they do*. This paper presents an account of a qualitative research project designed to extend the occupational science perspective on the nature of the relationship between occupations, their meanings and identity. The specific focus of the project was on occupations that could be classed as 'serious leisure'. Serious leisure occupations demand of their participants' significant investment of time, energy and other resources; hence it is suggested that they can be classed, as can some work occupations, as 'engaging occupations' (Jonsson, Josephsson, & Kielhofner, 2001) having particular potency in the construction of identities. The theoretical notion that people's occupational lives shape their identities is discussed below, before the study in which narratives told about serious leisure occupations were analysed is described to better understand *how* identity is constructed.

Engaging in Occupation, Constructing Identity

Throughout the lifespan people engage in a range of occupations; some, such as going to school, are specific

to particular life-stages or contexts, others, such as eating, persist through life. Occupations are generally regarded as being meaningful and purposeful to the individual; they are "chunks of activity within the ongoing stream of human behaviour which are named in the lexicon of the culture" (Yerxa et al., 1989, p. 5). These ideas are the basis for two lines of thinking in occupational science about the ways in which everyday activities shape identity.

First, Unruh (2004) explored the concept of the *occupational identity,* contrasting three perspectives (Christiansen, 1999; Kielhofner, 2002; Unruh, Versnel, & Kerr, 2002). Christiansen (1999) had not used the term occupational identity, but all three texts agreed that identity can be said to be composed of the individual's occupations over the evolving life story. In addition, the shaping of the occupational identity is influenced by interaction with context (Unruh et al., 2002), particularly when one's occupations are fulfilling and meaningful within that context (Kielhofner, 2002). Laliberte-Rudman (2002) has provided some support for these ideas in her secondary analysis of data from three other studies. She found that, in relation to identity construction, occupations enable the demonstration of core characteristics, with continuity of a personally satisfying identity that can be consciously managed to achieve social recognition and approval. Laliberte-Rudman's paper, as does work by Clark (1993) and Howie, Coulter, and Feldman (2004), lends support to Christiansen's ideas that identity is constructed through occupation in a process that involves social interaction, agency and reflexive self-consciousness. Alsaker and Josephsson (2003), in their study of five people with chronic rheumatic disease illustrated how, faced with ongoing challenges in everyday life, people negotiated identities through occupational choices related to their personal histories.

The ongoing construction of identity throughout a life, then, can be understood in terms of the range and history of an individual's occupations. A second line of thinking, which includes studies within and outside of occupational science, has examined the personal and social meanings of particular occupations and the societal contexts in which they occur. An awareness of the perceived social value of certain occupations enables them to be used to construct positive identities (Magnus, 2001). Further, group affiliation and social identification are powerful forces in making meaning and shaping identity in some occupations (Baldwin & Norris, 1999). Not all occupations, however, are valued in all social contexts. Social stereotypes of occupations, that can be negatively or positively evaluated, have been explored in relation to identity construction (Taylor, 2003). Such stereotypes are derived within societal discourses, which impact on occupational choices and meaning. Asaba and Jackson (2011) recently argued for greater critical reflection within occupational science on the tensions that prevailing social ideologies can create for individuals in the process of engaging in occupations and negotiating identities. The occupations that people engage in can be associated with oppression and stigmatisation, or empowerment and resistance. Art-making, for example, was meaningful as a form of resistance against stigmatising social identities in a study about people living with cancer (Reynolds & Prior, 2006).

The social situatedness of occupations clearly has great influence over whether they are experienced as meaningful or not, and how they influence the shaping of identity. Identity has been defined, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, as "the person's location in social life" (Hewitt, 1994, p. 111). Symbolic interactionism, initially conceptualised by Mead and described by his student Blumer (1969), provides a theoretical perspective on identity construction and facilitates understanding of the relationship between occupations, their symbolic meanings and identity. The concept of the occupational identity is informed by this understanding (Christiansen, 1999; Kielhofner, 2002). It is a basic premise of symbolic interactionism that people live in a world of 'objects' that can be acted upon. Objects can be anything that people refer to, such as physical items, human beings or abstract ideas. Such

objects have meanings that are conferred on them by the individuals who interact with them (Blumer, 1969). Some meanings are shared widely; there may be a common learned societal understanding of what an object symbolises. Some objects may have particular meaning within smaller social groups. A shared understanding of objects facilitates meaningful interaction. Thus it can be seen that human occupations, being "named in the lexicon of the culture" (Yerxa et al., 1989, p. 5) are themselves objects with meaning.

From this perspective, the individual also regards his or herself as an object, and can reflect on his or her own actions (Blumer, 1969). The self is made up of the stable, core self-concept known as the 'me', plus the 'I'. It is the 'I' that contributes to the shaping of the 'me' by interpreting the meaning of feedback from others during interactions. The internalised self becomes part of the socially located identity and *vice versa*. The occupations in which people engage have societally understood symbolic meanings which impact on interactions with others, shaping identity and the developing internalised self (Christiansen, 1999). Indeed, "people see themselves, are seen by others and see how others see them through engaging in occupations" (Asaba & Jackson, 2011, p. 150).

Serious leisure: A particularly meaningful occupation

The study described in this paper reflects a school of thought (Jonsson et al., 2001; Persson, Erlandsson, Eklund, & Iwarsson, 2001; Whalley Hammell, 2009), which focuses attention on the *meaning* of occupations (as opposed to their *purpose*) as being particularly valuable in understanding their impact on, and value for, human living. Categorisations of occupations based on their purpose, such as productivity, leisure or self-care, have proved troublesome because they often have meanings that go beyond the supposed purpose of the activity (Whalley Hammell, 2009).

For each individual, some occupations are more meaningful than others. Jonsson et al. (2001) proposed the concept of the 'engaging occupation'. Infused with positive meaning, engaged in intensely, and consisting of a coherent set of activities, the engaging occupation often goes beyond personal pleasure; it involves membership of an occupational community and can be considered analogous to work. The 'engaging occupation' has several features in common with the 'serious leisure' described by Stebbins (1997). While casual leisure activity is relatively short-lived, involving little special training and no long term 'career', serious leisure demands investment of time, resources and energy, the development of specialist skills and knowledge, and perseverance in adversity. Serious leisure enthusiasts have a 'career' in their chosen occupation; indeed they have many similarities to those who have a strong positive attachment to their work (Stebbins, 2004). They move in a unique social world, derive benefits associated with self-image and self-enrichment, and identify strongly with the occupation, its artefacts and others who share their interests (Stebbins, 2001). While it can be argued that engagement in *any* occupation contributes to the construction of identity, engagement in serious or engaging occupations, whether the purpose is work, leisure or self-care, has particular potency. A serious commitment over a period of time to such an activity invests it with special meaning and the potential for what Jenkins (2004) called 'identification': the construction of identity.

Relating occupation, co-constructing identity

Identity can be conceptualized as a narrative that one performs for others, and for oneself, about one's self (Polkinghorne, 1991). Meaning is created as the individual tries to make his or her personal narrative coherent, as a highly individualized identity is composed and performed. The idea of the narrative identity permits a picture of some continuity and permanence, alongside change and responsiveness to contingencies, as demonstrated in Mishler's study of craft-artists (1999). This is a perspective congruent with symbolic interaction and with the idea of the occupational identity, a life story populated with occupations. Hänninen (2004) made the distinction between the lived and the told narrative. Identity is constructed through

the actions of a life and through the act of relating the events of a life in dialogue with others (Alsaker & Josephsson, 2003; Josephsson, Asaba, Jonsson, & Alsaker, 2006). In either case, the narrative identity is a performance for the self and for others (Goffman, 1959) and is subject to ongoing construction.

With action and 'doing' at its centre, the study of identity within occupational science benefits greatly from Goffman's notions of impression management and contextually meaningful performance (Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2010). People are active in the construction of their own identities, employing self-consciousness, reflexivity and personal agency (Giddens, 1991) in their actions (and occupations) and in their talk about those actions. In the interaction between the narrative-performer and the audience, identity is co-constructed as the meanings of activities and events are conveyed, negotiated and acknowledged.

There is a growing body of understanding about the way in which *what we do* makes us *who we are*. Through interactions occupations are made meaningful and the individual can build a narrative performance of the identity for others, which is internalised to become the self. An individual's occupational identity is made up of a history of occupations engaged in over time, yet there is more to be explored, such as particularly meaningful occupations and how these contribute to the shaping of self and identity. The aim of this study was to explore how people's narratives regarding their particularly meaningful leisure occupations contributed to the construction of identity.

Method

The challenge in this research design was to employ an approach that would bring a symbolic interactionist perspective to the analysis of narratives that people told about their occupations. Accepting that identity is a story that is told to others about the self, and that identity and meaning are co-constructed during interaction and dialogue between the interviewee and the interviewer, a qualitative research approach was chosen, with interviews as the method of collecting narratives. The narratives were subjected to interpretation, to explore layers of meaning. Analysis focussed on the events and actions described by the individual and the ways in which these were interpreted and presented to another.

Narrative research can focus on critical life-events or whole lives; however, a more restricted definition of a narrative was employed here, focusing on small, self-contained stories, recounting specific incidents (Bamberg, 2006). This enabled a focus on the detail of particular occupations. The narratives were taken as the unit of analysis, enabling attention to be given to the meaning of an occupation as recounted in each episode; rather than on the construction of an occupational identity over a life. The study was approved by the University of Salford Research Governance and Ethics Sub-Committee.

The sample of passionate narrators

Given the focus of the study on the theoretical proposition that there is a relationship between identity, narrative and occupation, theory-based sampling was employed (Kuzel, 1992) to select a group likely to yield material that was information-rich. The study sample of serious leisure enthusiasts might be expected to enjoy talking abundantly about their passion.

Gatekeepers (Fontana & Frey, 2003), who were acquaintances of the first author, were given information leaflets and asked to pass them to people that they knew were leisure enthusiasts. In this way, 17 participants were recruited. Recruitment ended when the interviews appeared to be producing little unique material. Each participant was given an anonymising code name related to his or her occupation. Although all participants were recruited from the North-West of England, attempts were made to make the sample heterogeneous in other respects, including the range of occupations engaged in (Table 1).

Table 1: The Participants, Described by their Leisure Occupation Code Names

	Age	Gender	Work*	Family status	Highest level of education*	Ethnic background*
Soul-singer	16	f	Student	Single	Left school at 16	Black Caribbean
Runner	24	f	Nurse	Lives with partner	Degree	White British
Artist	30	f	Healthcare worker	Single, 3 children	Degree	Bangladeshi
Bird-watcher	30	m	Shop assistant	Married	Left school at 16	White British
Amateur operatics performer	35	f	Administrator	Married, 1 child	Diploma	White British
Gym-member	38	f	Outreach worker	Single, 1 child	Diploma	Caribbean / Jamaican
Dog-trainer	39	f	'Rights of Way' officer	Single	Masters pending	White English
Mountain-biker	40	m	Painter and Decorator	Single	City & Guilds	White British
Canoeist	43	f	Teacher / trainer	Single, 1 child	Degree	Black British
Horn-player	44	m	Scientist	Married, 3 children	Doctorate	White Caucasian
Bridge-player	45	m	I.T. Consultant	Married, 2 children	Degree	White British
Horse-rider	48	f	Health care manager	Married, 1 child	Postgraduate	White Caucasian
Railway-worker	49	m	Environment agency officer	Married, 3 children	Degree	White English
Fisherman	50	m	Builder, self employed	Married, 2 children	Left school at 16	White English
Scuba-diver	55	f	Social worker	Married, 3 children	Degree	White UK
Choral-singer	61	f	Retired Teacher	Married, 3 children	MSc	White British
Yoga-practitioner	71	f	Secretary, retired	Married, 2 children	Left school at 14	White English

*self descriptors

The interviewer/researcher

In a study such as this, the interviewer plays a significant part in the construction of the interview material, not least by being an audience (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Here the first author, who conducted the interviews, introduces herself.

> *I am an occupational therapist, lecturer and researcher, who carried out this study for my doctorate. Like the study participants, I live in the North-West of England. I live with my partner and have helped to raise his children. My leisure life ebbs and flows. Work and research eat into leisure time. Sometimes my work feels like leisure. I have never pursued a leisure occupation seriously, though yoga, knitting, hill-walking, gardening, reading, theatre and running weave their way through my occupational identity, each jostling for primacy at different times. I like to listen to people talking about their enthusiasms, and so it was a pleasure to gather these narratives. I reflected on my role as 'audience' throughout the process. A research interview is an unusual type of conversation and I was conscious of my role*

in helping to put people at their ease. This influenced how I dressed, how I introduced myself and what personal information I shared. I made field notes about my reactions to people, which helped me to understand my role as audience to their 'performances'. The second author of the paper was my doctorate supervisor, serving as an audience for the narratives told by me, helping me to find meaning. Throughout this paper the first person plural is used except where it is important to bring my 'self' to the fore.

Self-consciousness and reflexivity were recorded throughout the research process, which contributed to the transparency, honesty and rigor of the data collection and analysis (Ballinger, 2006).

Procedure

The leisure enthusiasts took part in unstructured, recorded interviews lasting up to 60 minutes. They took place in the participant's own home in all but one case (the participant's workplace). An 'active' interview approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) with flexible, simple prompts was used to elicit narratives about occupation. For example, people were asked to talk about when they became involved in the activity, memorable occasions, and reasons for doing it.

Narrative analysis

A total of 78 short narratives were isolated and analysed using an approach which focused on narrative meaning through structure, coherence, interaction and performative features. Verbatim transcriptions, including non-lexical utterances, pauses and false starts were prepared for the analysis, which drew on sociolinguistic and dramaturgical influences; thus enabling the content, meaning and performance of each narrative to be examined. From each transcript, up to 6 narratives were extracted. Narratives were identified as self-contained units of discourse in which a specific event or sequence of events occurred in a particular time and place (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000). The majority of the narratives were accounts of past actions, but some were hypothetical or habitual narratives (Riessman, 1993). In all cases, the meaning of the narrative, and how it was told, was considered important, rather than the reality of its content.

Each narrative underwent a three part analytic process. Part one examined the narrative's content, structure and meaning by giving attention to its poetic structure using a method of presenting the text in lines and stanzas as described by Gee (1986) and advocated by Riessman (1993). Drawing attention to the poetic delivery of language uncovers meaning, as well as speech patterns and rhythms. Next, a structural analysis, based on an understanding that every narrative is told for a purpose, was used to identify the orientation, complication, evaluation and resolution of the narrative (Labov & Waletzky, 1966). The evaluation (the point) of each narrative was crucial in helping to understand what meanings occupations can have for people.

Analyses that give attention purely to narrative structure have been criticized for neglecting the interaction between interviewer and interviewee and its impact on the construction of what is said (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). The second part of analysis thus gave attention to such interactions and the dramatic performance of the narrative. This stage focused on plot, the use of voice, rhythms, patterns, metaphors, tension and other dramatic devices, as well as the interviewer's role (Goffman, 1959; Polkinghorne, 1991). In the third analytic phase, the coherence (Agar & Hobbs, 1982) of each narrative was examined, allowing further attention to what was said and why, including the speaker's values and beliefs. Each of the 78 narratives was subject to this close examination of how the meanings of these occupations were conveyed and negotiated, enabling the participant-narrator to actively construct an identity in interaction with the interviewer-audience.

Using an iterative process of cross-tabulation and mapping, the similarities and differences between the narrative meanings were synthesised into a framework representing 'the occupied self'. The

framework emerged inductively from the data, through a process of crosschecking and re-grouping. Below, the framework is described, enabling an understanding of the occupied self, and its relationship with identity.

Findings

> His recitals were amusing in themselves to Sir Thomas, but the chief object in seeking them was to understand the reciter, to know the young man by his histories; and he listened to his clear, simple, spirited details with full satisfaction – seeing in them, the proof of good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage and cheerfulness – everything that could deserve or promise well. (Austen, 1814, p. 177)

In the process of telling their narratives, these individuals were sense-making, understanding and reflecting on the range of societal meanings associated with their occupation. By emphasising particular meanings, the internalised self and the socially presented identity were being shaped in interaction with each other. This reflection on, and emphasis of particular meanings associated with engagement in an occupation is an expression of the 'occupied self' under construction.

Three groupings of narrative meanings emerged (refer Figure 1). Within the narrator / audience relationship of each interview the identity of the narrator was constructed by placing particular emphasis on the 'located self', the 'active self' or the 'changing self' in relation to the occupation. While it is usual for a told narrative to contain elements that give an account of context, activity and transformation (Polkinghorne, 1991), the analysis showed that each participant usually foregrounded one or another of these dimensions as if it were particularly important in presenting the self to another. Each of these three dimensions had a range of facets that could be brought to the foreground in each narrative, thus enabling the individual to shape a unique configuration of identity. The word facet, defined as "one side of something many-sided" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2002), is a reminder that identity is what is shown to others in society, though perhaps not all facets are shown together. The dimensions and facets around which participants constructed their identities can be presented as a structured framework (Figure 1), which offers a way of understanding how the personal meanings of serious leisure might contribute to identity construction.

	DIMENSIONS		
	The located self	The active self	The changing self
FACETS	Society and relationships	Agency	Self is changed
	Time	Competence	Occupation is changed
	Place	Morality	
	Body / mind		

Figure 1: The Framework of the Occupied Self

The analysis of narratives enabled an examination of the ways in which the self and identity are constructed through the replaying of experiences; people engaged with an occupation and then told about that engagement. In the telling, they chose to represent their "selves" in a way that emphasized certain dimensions and facets. The various parts of the framework exist for everyone, but the ways in which each individual brings them to the fore, providing material to shape the occupied self, is unique. Below, illustrated with narrative extracts, each of the dimensions is discussed.

The active self

> *it's body weight,*
> *it's your body,*
> *to ride a bike,*
> *it's your body,*
> *not your steering,*
> *don't count on your steering,*
> *for trying to swerve round the rocks.*
> *Split seconds left or right,*
> *bang, go rigid,*
> *it's as quick as that.* (The Mountain-biker)

'Being active' was sometimes foregrounded to become the main meaning of the narrative. These 'being active' narratives could be told to emphasize a point relating to the protagonist's agency, competence or morality - the three facets of the

Table 2: The Facets of the Active Self

Facet	Forms Found in the Data
Agency	Feeling helpless
	Overcoming obstacles
	Reacting to contingencies
	Setting and achieving goals
	Feeling in control
Competence	Social display of competence
	Personally experienced competence
	Lacking competence
	Developing competence
Morality	Loyalty
	Fulfilling obligations
	Helping others
	Social concerns / conscience
	Ethic of care for self
	Pondering selfishness
	The influence of an external moral authority (e.g. religion)

"active self". Each of these facets was found to have several forms within the data (refer Table 2).

Agency

When an individual engages in occupation, he or she is interacting with the environment. This is often, but not always, associated with a perception of feeling in control. A sense of agency is associated with initiating activity, problem-solving and meeting challenges. Through the telling of a narrative, the individual could convey a sense of agency, or a sense of lacking agency, feeling helpless. Some of the narratives told about protagonists who had taken control of, or overcome obstacles, while pursuing their leisure careers. Faced with problems such as dead cats, broken bones and Foot and Mouth disease, the protagonists in various narratives managed to demonstrate agency, but occasionally they shared their experiences of feeling helpless. The Labovian analysis is shown in brackets.

> *they didn't put me in the girl band*
> *because they wanted to sign me on my own,*
> *definitely, which was good*
> *but then that didn't quite work out, so –*
> *that's why in competitions,*
> *none of it's fair, (Evaluation)*
> *'cos, like, I did deserve to be in the band*
> *but then they said 'oh, no because you're too good'*
>
> *so I sang solo –*
> *everything's just . . . I don't know, you just don't know what's happening.* (The Soul-singer)

Competence

Participants frequently told narratives that involved a presentation of the self as competent. Several of the participants were highly skilled in their field and some (the Bridge-player and the Horse-rider) had demonstrated competence in national competitions. Some participants told narratives that placed an emphasis on a lack of competence or on developing competence, while others told about competence displayed to others, or simply to the self (although telling the narrative transformed this into a social display). A narrative which foregrounded competence as a facet of the occupied self could do this in a subtle way. The Mountain-biker, in the above extract, convinces the audience of his skill by recreating the excitement of a 30 mph bike ride. He used the rhythm and speed of his speech to mimic the activity being described, giving a sense of the identity he is presenting (fearless, focused, able and skilled).

Morality

Engagement in occupation gives the individual an opportunity to display values which may or may not be in accord with the values of society. Identity and morality are closely linked; "*we have a sense of who we are through a sense of where we stand in relation to 'the good'*" (Crossley, 2000, p. 16). Telling a narrative about one's occupations gives a chance to display a moral facet of one's identity. The participants did this in a range of ways (Table 2). Some illustrated loyalty and fulfilment of obligations, some a social conscience or an ethic of caring. Several people told narratives that emphasised their morality. The Horn-player told a hypothetical narrative in

which he tried to imagine his future in the musical community.

I know there will come a point in time (Orientation)
when I'm not as good as I want to be,
I'll have to make way for somebody else to take my place (Complication)
One of the things though,
I hope that I'll be mature enough to accept that

You know, I want to develop young children,
so they can grow into adults who can play as well (Imaginary resolution)
So part of this is, you know, I have done, teaching kids
to try and repay some of that patience
that other teachers have given me in my time as well

Here the Horn-player placed a moral meaning central to his tale, as he did in others. An identity with a strong moral facet was thus constructed.

The located self

it was a summer day (Orientation)
we had a steam engine on the front,
a wonderful steam engine, a big one, a good one
we'd driven up and down that line ten times, whatever
(three descriptive stanzas omitted)

and I can remember getting off the train
I was really on cloud nine
Thinking 'that was superb' (Resolution)
no (laughs) it was great,

and I'll be honest with you
I'd been working!
But I'd been working at what I enjoy doing, you know

and what I got out of it was (Evaluation)
actually, being part of a railway family
being associated with the steam engines, with that era,
with the children that had come,
with the families that had come,
with the people that had come,
and being able to not only enjoy myself which was fantastic
but to see them enjoying it as well. (The Railwayman)

Some people gave more emphasis to the *location* for the action than the action itself. By doing this they conveyed the idea that, for them, identity is shaped by particular contexts. The narrative meanings were grouped into four facets within this dimension: location in society and relationships, in time, in place, in body and mind. Table 3 illustrates what forms each of these facets could take.

Society and relationships

Perhaps the largest grouping, and the least surprising, is the facet of the self located amongst others. This facet encompasses various forms, ranging from identifying the self through occupation with societal and cultural concerns, with family or with groups, and forming identity through relationships with individual people and with animals. An example of socially locating one's identity is given here by the Yoga-practitioner (a woman of 71), who told a tale about someone in her yoga class.

because there's a lady goes who's 81
and she said, she always says to me
she's been going even longer than I have
and she said 'you're much better at yoga than I am'
she said 'and when you're as old as me, you'll be better at it'

but I won't because I'm not as dedicated as her.
She doesn't cook,
she doesn't bother cleaning,
she doesn't bother with housework or anything.
Her leisure activities are her life,
well there's a lot more in my life than just leisure. (Evaluation)

The narrator creates a meaning here that is based on drawing a comparison between another and herself. They both engage in the same occupation,

Table 3: The Facets of the Located Self

Facet	Forms Found in the Data
Located in society and relationships	Having social responsibility
	The social self developing
	Having the right tools and practices
	Dealing with family and cultural expectations
	Affiliation with family
	Group membership as positive or as problematic
	Social image / looking foolish
	Social image / gaining esteem
	Feeling socially inadequate, self doubts
	Comparing self with others
	Relating to friends
	Relating to an animal
Located in time	Amount of time occupied
	A special time, a season, is featured
	The impact of childhood
	A connection across generations
	Identifying with an era
	Looking to the future
	Time measures ability
Located in place	Risky and safe places
	The amount of space occupied (widening or diminishing spaces)
	A special places (e.g. nature, the elements, a particular place)
	Where the activity can be done
Located in body	Emotional
	Sensory
	Awareness of the body
	The body as vulnerable (to risk, illness, age)
	Caring for the body / mind

but the Yoga-practitioner suggests that it has a different meaning for each of them. She creates a facet of her occupied self and her socially performed identity in this way.

Time

For some narrators, location in time was important in making an activity meaningful. Time can take on special meaning for those who use it as a measure of competence, such as the Runner; whereas others, such as the Fisherman and the Horn-player, told narratives about occupations that linked them to past or future generations. For more than one individual, an occupation associated with a past era appeared to contribute to meaning and identity construction. In the extract at the head of this section, the Railwayman, a steam-railway preservationist, describes an evocative scene, which conveys the meaning that this occupation has for him and how he identifies with it. He locates himself socially, amongst people and the tools and practices of the occupation, and also temporally, not just in summer, but in all the idealised summers of the steam-train era. It is a powerful narrative, drawing on dramatic effects such as metaphor, superlatives and rhythmic repetition to create meaning.

Place

Some people found meaning in their occupations by emphasizing location in place. The Horse-rider told of trotting along peaceful country lanes, enjoying the sights and sounds. The Scuba-diver, here, makes it clear that this activity is not about treasure hunting, or technical prowess; for her, diving is about the experience of being immersed in water.

> *but, now, it's just absolutely wonderful,*
> *I mean I just love being in the water,*
> *it's almost like a sensual experience, you know,*
> *and that first breath underwater, absolutely*
> *magic! It really is.*

Body and mind

For some participants, the body (including mind) was a significant location, which made an occupation meaningful. In this extract the body, as a location for the conscious construction of a preferred self, is made clear by the Gym-member as she explains why she joined a gym.

> *I had no self esteem,*
> *and I did not like my physique*
> *even though people kept on saying that it was lovely,*
> *I hated it,*
> *and I still had to stop running,*
> *because I weren't built for running at all*

So I went into the gym
because I know once this guy
he said I had a saggy bottom –
and it did – and it just affected me so much.

There were other examples of this facet. The meaning of running, for the Runner, was impacted on by damage to her body and several people regarded their occupations as sources of stress and/or de-stressing. In terms of constructing identity, this was a fourth possibility for locating one's self.

The changing self

once when I was 12
I sung in a karaoke in Tunisia,
and I sung a Whitney Houston song

and what it was, it was like,
a guy's voice breaks,
it's like my voice just –
it was really, just cute before,
it's like it just matured,
obviously not overnight,

but that was when I first realised that –
wow, it's got something to it, (Evaluation)
and it was unprepared,
but I just went up,
and my voice just went up,
it was like my voice just sounded a lot better
than it usually did –
that was big. (The Soul-singer)

The third dimension of the occupied self that might be given emphasis in the meaning of a narrative is 'the changing self'. Here, the narrative meanings appeared to fall into two facets: 'changing in the self', and 'changing in relation to occupational engagement'. Some people chose to make change the main meaning of their narrative, and so it contributed to the construction of identity, at the point of telling. Table 4 illustrates these two facets and the forms they took.

Table 4: The Facets of 'the Changing Self'

Facet	Forms Found in the Data
Changing in self	A physical change
	A psychological change
	A change in social status
	Become satisfied or fulfilled
	Something is learnt
	Being pulled two ways
Changing occupational engagement	Doing less or more
	Doing worse or better
	First special encounter with the activity
	Doing it differently

Changing in self
Engagement in an occupation will probably always result in a change in the self, but some people told narratives that showed that this change had particular meaning for them. The young amateur Soul-singer (above) told about the day when she knew that there had been a significant physical change that impacted on her singing. The narrative describes a meaningful moment. For the audience, it is like witnessing a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. For the narrator, her sense of self had changed.

Changing occupational engagement
The second facet is concerned with the changes that can take place, over time, in the individual's relationship with an occupation. These changes might involve first encounters with an occupation, doing it differently and changes in the quality or quantity of experience (Table 4). The Dog-trainer told of additional roles that she took on: becoming a newsletter editor and a club secretary, while the Yoga-practitioner told of how she had to do less yoga as she got older. At the beginning of one's relationship with an engaging occupation, however, the quantity and quality of engagement might increase over time, as described by the Fisherman in this narrative.

I should say I started fishing
when I were probably -
well, we all do,
you know, you go into the street
and round where your house is,
with minnows, with jars and what have you,
you know, probably about 6 or 7 year old
and then you carry on, don't you?

and then to 11 and 12,
and then you get fishing rods,
you know, or you borrow one,
or you just get a piece of line on a stick or whatever,

and then when you get older
you can buy a proper fishing rod and a reel.

His delivery of this narrative has some interesting features. It is clear from his use of the pronouns 'we' and 'you' that he assumes a universality of experience; yet perhaps because of gender, geography or inclination, this was not an experience that the first author identified with. He is creating a vision of a 'typical' child's adventures with which many across a global community might identify, but which, for him, continued 'seriously' into adulthood. When an individual has a long-term relationship with an occupation, that relationship and the meaning of the occupation may change over time, shaping identity.

The examples above reveal that when telling a narrative about engagement in an occupation, a narrator illustrates its personal meaning and so constructs a facet of identity to put before the audience. Each facet does not stand separately; identity is multi-facetted. A narrative might give emphasis to social location, while also expressing a moral intent; another might focus on the body as location, while emphasizing how the self has changed.

Discussion

The results of this study offer a framework that may help to structure and enhance what is currently understood about the relationship between human occupation, its meanings and the construction of identity. Emerging from a synthesis of narrative meanings, the framework offers a conceptualization of the occupied self. While *engaged* in an occupation the individual experiences action, location and change. In *telling* about the occupation the individual conveys to another that some facets of these dimensions are more personally meaningful than others. The process of telling about occupational engagement is a process of constructing the unique self, the occupied self, in interaction with another. In this way identity, the socially situated self, is shaped. The foregrounding of certain meanings is the process by which the individual constructs a unique identity. It is not just *what we do* but also what the occupation *means* that matters.

Occupational identity is composed of an array of occupations engaged in throughout a life. Occupational engagement changes over time, and occupations have particular meanings for each individual. In the evolution of the occupational identity, each occupation helps to shape the self. Alsaker and Josephsson (2003) have suggested that everyday activities serve as mediators for personal meanings in the construction of occupational identities. The framework described may help with understanding the range of meanings that the individual can draw on and foreground during this process.

Some of the assumptions underpinning the concept of occupational identity have been critically examined (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009). People cannot always exercise free will and choice in their occupations; yet the occupations that people engage in are imbued with meanings derived from symbolic interaction within the individual's own societal context. An individual, talking about his or her occupations, constructs a sense of self (and identity) that is understood in his or her wider social context, as well as the immediate context of a conversation. One of the participants in this study, the Horse-rider, shared a narrative about her experiences of fox-hunting. In the telling, she displayed awareness that, while the activity was accepted in her own social circle, it is not accepted by all and she seemed uncertain about how the first author was receiving the tale and her part in it. The Canoeist narrated her concern about the lack of opportunities for young black women in the inner city. The extent to which social discourses impact on choice, access and meaning in relation to occupations was made clear in some of the narratives in this study, but

not others. The construction of identities takes place within an inter-play between social structures and ideologies, and the human capacity to reflect and act (Asaba & Jackson, 2011; Giddens, 1991; Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2010).

The framework is a construction, derived from interpretations of narrative meanings and with some influence from *a priori* reading. Such influences did not provide any template during the analytic process, but could not be bracketed away from consciousness. The framework displays congruence with Plummer's (2001) conceptualisation of the human being described in life stories as being contextually embedded, surrounded by fateful moments, embodied, universal and with a moral character, and with Harré and Gillett's (1994) notion of identity being located within spatial, temporal, moral and social manifolds. While these authors were conceptualising identity in general terms, here the focus is on identity as it relates to narratives about occupation.

The narrative analyses showed that when people talked about their occupations they were able to emphasise various facets of the active, the located and the changing self. Some of the facets of the occupied self have been identified and discussed by others. Christiansen (1999) noted that occupations allow the expression of competence and moral values, while Alsaker and Josephsson (2003) suggested that everyday activities serve as mediators of personal values. The importance that social locatedness can have in relation to the meaning of an occupation was emphasised when Whalley Hammell (2004) suggested that Wilcock's definition of occupation be expanded from 'doing, being, becoming', to include 'belonging'. This might have meaning to the individual in various ways, as illustrated by the different facets of social belonging in the framework above. An occupation can be meaningful because it locates the individual with family, or friends, or within a wider societal context (Reed, Hocking, & Smythe, 2010). Within social contexts, occupations can have meanings associated with, for example, being valued (Magnus, 2001), with oppression (Asaba & Jackson, 2011), or with acts of resistance (Reynolds & Prior, 2006). The framework presented here suggests other facets, such as feeling inadequate or being similar to others.

Location can also relate to belonging in a particular place, a dimension of occupational meaning acknowledged by the April 2009 issue of the Journal of Occupational Science. More recently Huot and Laliberte Rudman (2010) discussed the importance that place can have for the performance of identity through occupation, in immigrant people. Time, as a location that confers meaning on an occupation, provides the backdrop in any study in which a narrative understanding of a life is employed. In these cases (e.g. Jonsson et al., 2001; Josephsson et al., 2006) occupation, situated in time, is often associated with transition, such as retirement, and is thus associated with changes in occupation and in the self.

The framework described in this paper brings together these various facets in a way that offers a systematic examination of possible meanings that occupations might have in their full combined complexity; acknowledging that people construct their 'selves' by, at times, foregrounding selected facets. For one person, running might be about winning races, for another it might be about reducing stress levels and being with friends. A third runner might be raising funds for charity. In these three cases, running might have meaning related to competence, personal change, location in society, or morality. There is a danger however, that a framework such as this might be regarded as reductionist, attempting to break down human identity into parts. The use of the words 'dimension' and 'facet' is important and serves as a reminder of the many interconnected faces and layers of human identity, impacted on by each other and by context. Each part of the framework cannot stand alone.

The focus of this paper has been on the meanings of occupations. Although serious leisure occupations have been chosen as a vehicle for exploring

the relationship between identity and occupation, it is the 'seriousness' that is important, rather than the supposed leisure intent of the occupations. Jonsson et al.'s (2001) concept of the engaging occupation is an important concept that, in terms of understanding the power of occupations, transcends the leisure / work divide. Within the construct of the occupational identity, Unruh et al. (2002) suggested that work occupations might contribute to the public and more valued aspects of identity, while leisure and self-care, being more solitary, contribute to private aspects. Yet work, leisure and self-care are not so easily separated or categorised, and the idea of work occupations making a more socially valued contribution to a public occupational identity has been disputed as one that may not be relevant to people from all cultures and classes (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009). The meanings of occupations may be of more relevance than their purpose when trying to understand the human condition.

Study Limitations and Future Research

The framework of the occupied self is suggested as a possible way of understanding the complex relationship between occupations, their meanings and the construction of identity. Although based on a systematic, rigorous and transparent process of data collection and analysis, the framework is, in itself, a construction, developed from single interviews with a sample of individuals in a geographically and culturally restricted location. This may have set boundaries on the facets that were revealed. Mason (2002) argued that the qualitative researcher should be able to make the case that research findings can be generalised, or shown to have wider resonance. In research such as this generalisations are not made from the sample to the population, but from the particular to the generic (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Theory-driven sampling was used and the nature of the process that relates any occupation to identity can be argued to be pervasive. The framework should theoretically be applicable in relation to other occupations and other people, but this possibility needs further exploration.

Given that every occupation in a lifespan acts as a mediator for personal meanings, there is further scope to investigate the relationship between the various elements of this framework and the concept of the occupational identity. Do some occupations contribute more than others to the overall occupational identity, and if so, how does this relate to their meaningfulness? The discussion above reveals that some of the dimensions and facets of the framework have already been examined in other studies. Yet some elements, for example the meaning of the body and mind as locations in occupational engagement, may provide fruitful avenues for further exploration.

The narratives collected for this study have been subject to a detailed analysis in relation to the focus of this study. There is scope for secondary analysis to further examine the ways that identities are negotiated in the interplay between social structures and ideologies and personal agency.

Conclusion

Each occupation appears to offer an array of dimensions and facets that enable the individual to construct a unique, complex and ever-changing identity in interaction with others. Using symbolic interactionist theory, this study has employed a narrative methodology to explore the meanings that people attach to their serious leisure occupations. The meanings were explored by giving close analytic attention to the short narratives that people told about their engagement with these significant and engaging occupations. The ensuing framework suggests a representation of the relationship between the occupations and their meanings and how these might contribute to the construction of identity. Yet the relationship between what people do and who they are, or who they become, is never simple, nor can it be explained in a reductionist or deterministic way. Here we give the final word to the Dog-trainer. She employs reflexivity and humour as she uses this narrative to present to the interviewer her struggle to consciously influence the construction of her

own identity by *not* taking her occupation any further.

I was trying to decide about having a second dog
and I kept saying
'oh I don't know whether the time's right'
and my sister said, 'well, if you wait for the perfect time
then you'll never get one',

and I said 'but I don't want to become a doggy person!

Once I get two, then you turn up
and it's not DT and her dog, you're like – this doggy person with all these dogs'

and she said 'I think you've past that stage already'
she said 'don't worry about that'. The Dog-trainer

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